

Reauthorizes and Funds Fire Protection and Safety Programs

WASHINGTON -The House Committee on Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation today approved a bill introduced by U.S. Rep Harry Mitchell to reauthorize and fund programs that provide critical resources to fire departments in Arizona and across the country.

The bill would provide critical federal support to fire departments at a time when many cities and towns are facing major budget shortfalls and cuts in services.

"We must ensure that our local firefighters have the tools and resources they need to keep us safe," Mitchell said. "This bill would provide support to firefighters across our country, including throughout Arizona's cities and small towns. While we can never thank our firefighters enough, we can work to ensure that they are equipped and prepared for the challenges they endure on our behalf."

The FIRE Grants Reauthorization Act of 2009, [H.R. 3791](#) , was introduced by Mitchell this week and advanced by the subcommittee today unanimously by voice vote.

The FIRE Grants program is composed of the Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) program, last reauthorized in 2005, and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program, last reauthorized in 2004.

From 2005 to 2008 Arizona has received 165 grants for total of \$22.5 million through the AFG program as well as 24 grants for total of \$3 million from 2005-2009 through the Fire Prevention and Safety Program, which will now be incorporated through the AFG program. Arizona has also received 26 grants for total of \$16.2 million through the SAFER program from 2005-2009.

The AFG program was created by Congress in 2000 because of concerns that local budgets were unable to handle the mounting responsibilities being assigned to the fire service. It provides funds to local fire departments to purchase equipment, vehicles, and training. Congress created the SAFER program in 2004 to help fire departments hire firefighting personnel and meet voluntary national consensus standards on safe minimum staffing levels. Both AFG and SAFER programs are administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The bill has a broad, bipartisan group of 40 cosponsors and has also been endorsed by The International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, and The National Volunteer Fire Council.

The bill includes the following provisions for AFG:

- It provides an authorization of \$1 billion per fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014.
- It apportions the total AFG funding as follows: Sets aside 25 percent for career fire departments, 25 percent for combination departments, and 25 percent for volunteer fire departments. It further provides that 10 percent of the funds shall be used for Fire Prevention and Safety Grants, 2 percent shall be used for volunteer, non-fire service EMS and rescue organizations, 3 percent may be used for state fire training academies, and the remaining 10 percent shall be left for open competition to all types of fire departments for the traditional AFG grants.
- It reduces the matching requirements for applicants from jurisdictions of a population of 20,000 or more to 10 percent.
- It increases the maximum allowable grant size for AFG, such that:
 - A population of 100,000 or less may receive up to \$1 million;
 - A population of 100,000 to 500,000 may receive up to \$2 million;
 - A population of 500,000 to 1,000,000 may receive up to \$3 million;
 - A population of 1,000,000 to 2,500,000 may receive up to \$6 million;
 - A population of 2,500,000 or more may receive up to \$9 million.
- It adds an economic hardship waiver for departments that are unable to reach the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements. Also, sets the maintenance of budget requirement at 80%, or above, the applicant's previous two fiscal year budgets.

The bill sets the following provisions for the SAFER program:

- It provides an authorization of \$1.194 billion per fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014.
- It sets the grant at three years (with the requirement that the department retain the hire for the entire three-year period of the grant).
- It sets the matching requirements at 20 percent per year of the grant.
- It eliminates an artificial cap on the maximum allowable grant size per firefighter.
- It includes an economic hardship waiver for departments that are unable to meet the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements. Provides for waivers for requirements that departments use the fund to supplement, rather supplant, local funds, as well as the requirement that the funds be used to hire additional firefighters rather than retain existing personnel.

For more information, visit the Science and Technology Committee's [website](#) .